DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 033 100 TE 001 433

By-Paffard, Michael

Created Creative?

English Assn., London (England).
Pub Date 68
Note-4p.
Journal Cit-English: Literature, Criticism, Teaching; v17 n99 p90-3 Autumn 1968
EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.30
Descriptors-Creative Ability, Creative Development, *Creative Expression, Creative Thinking, *Creativity, *English Instruction, Fine Arts, *Individual Development, Language, Literature, Originality, Secondary Education, Teacher Influence

The primary concern of the English teacher should be to develop the unique potential every student has for imaginative thinking and creative expression. The ability to think creatively stimulates the student's intellectual curiosity, frees him from the rigidity of social class values, religious dogma, and historical precedent, and enables him to attain self-knowledge and emotional stability. To foster student creativity, the teacher should (1) avoid establishing a "correct" standard of language usage or literature interpretation, (2) use the interests and values of the students in selecting materials for the class, and (3) rediscover and expand his own latent creativity by writing poetry and prose and studying various forms of language usage. (MP)

ED033100

English: Literature, Criticism, Teaching Vol. 17 No. 99, Autumn 1968

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY Michael Paffard & Margaret Willy, Ed.
TO ERIC AND ORGANIZATIONS OPERATING UNDER AGREEMENTS WITH THE U.S. OFFICE OF EDUCATION. FURTHER REPRODUCTION OUTSIDE THE ERIC SYSTEM REQUIRES PERMISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT OWNER."

Created Creative?

By MICHAEL PAFFARD

(*Senior Lecturer, Education Department, University of Keele*)

'CREATIVITY' is currently a much-publicized word. In the sciences, engineering, industry, and administration, even in the armed services, as well as in the arts, much attention is being devoted to the need for creative, imaginative thinking. An impressive amount of research has been done in recent years, particularly in the U.S.A., on the problems of identifying individuals of high creative potential and devising educational programmes or conditions of work that will conserve their energies and channel them in fruitful directions. Grave warnings are uttered from conference platforms: not only the satisfaction and well-being of some individuals are at stake but the economic strength and power to survive of whole nations. The brain drain is but one over-publicized facet of a world-wide problem.

It seems wise to view some recent shifts of emphasis in the teaching of English against this background. Many teachers of English at all levels, except, alas, in the universities, now see the development of genuinely creative speech, writing, and drama as central and not peripheral to their work. As Patrick Creber puts it, 'We are trying to create the conditions in the classroom where our pupils *can be* poets and novelists, *in posse* if not *in esse*, just as, in the laboratory, they are chemists or botanists or entomologists.'[1] Not many readers of this journal, one hopes, would seriously take objection to this view, but we all know that there are battles to be fought and much persuading to be done. It would be too optimistic to hope that the appearance of drearily stereotyped books of exercises with titles like *Creative English* will fool nobody. Sometimes when I have said to audiences of parents or even teachers of English that *all*, and not merely the exceptional few children we teach, are capable of using language creatively, I have been met with growls of incredulity or that politely knowing look which says 'I suppose he's paid to have his head in the clouds'. Recently a student of mine was rebuked by the senior English teacher under whom he was working for proposing to set his class to write an imaginative composition: they were an unimaginative lot, he was told, and anyway it would be a waste of time since they would have no occasion to use a pen when they left school except to fill up forms and write an occasional letter.

The whole orientation of much secondary school English teaching, particularly in grammar schools, is still towards a depressingly utilitarian literacy and the false notion that there is one universally applicable standard of correct English. When proficiency has been reached, at the earliest possible moment, in manipulating the written word within these adult conventions, it is assumed that the time is ripe for forcing a premature acquaintance with 'the great works of our literary heritage', and so the artificial dualism of 'Eng. Lang.' and 'Eng. Lit.' is perpetuated.

There are, perhaps, only two ways in which the teacher who is rooted in this time-honoured tradition could be moved to examine his basic assumptions about what language is and does, and neither is likely to be very practicable. In the first place one would want him to work with a really good teacher over a period of time, and see that when the children's speaking and writing about what is near and real and important *to them* is made the centre of the syllabus rather than the contents of books of exercises or even a corpus of literary texts, *all* the children *some* of the time can produce language that is vital, beautiful, and a true instrument of growth and self-knowledge, a truly creative ordering and sharing of experience. He would see, too, that 'correctness'

[1] J. W. Patrick Creber, *Sense and Sensitivity*, U.L.P., 1965, p. 12.

TE001 433

of expression can be largely left to look after itself once the children want to communicate creatively. Anthologies of children's creative writing, however impressive their contents, are not the answer because the proposition that some highly intelligent and articulate children have literary gifts of a high order is not in dispute.

The second line of attack on the un- or anti-creative English teacher would be to help him rediscover and develop his own latent creativity, however vestigial and stunted by his formal education. This, alas, is even less likely to be practicable. Literature has paid a disastrous price for becoming the one academically respectable art. As James Britton once remarked, in institutions of higher education, music, painting, and sculpture are things that you do but literature is something that other people have done. The English specialist from university or college has often long since forgotten through neglect his own capacity with toil and trial for matching words to his own unique experience. Leave philology, literary history, and textual criticism where they belong in the universities: what we need, one feels, are departments in Colleges of Art for the study and *practice* of literature. In that ethos there might be a reasonable chance of a sane balance between knowing and doing and the emergence of teachers with a creative orientation.

In a short article what, really, can be said except 'go and see' and 'try and do'? Argument may be fruitless and yet there is, surely, an urgent need for exploring the foundations of that faith in man's inherent creativity which inspires the best English teaching today. The reflections which follow are the most tentative and personal gropings in this direction.

Christianity along with many other religions asserts that God made man in His own image. Today it seems to many people, as it seemed to Oscar Wilde, that the proposition makes more sense if you turn it back to front. Whatever the right way round of it, a necessary implication which is seldom given much emphasis in religious teaching, must be that man is basically and by nature himself creative. Just as in the whole of education children have been traditionally expected to acquire knowledge from authority, so the churches have insisted that they acquire their beliefs from authority and their moral standards, too, for that matter. Creative thinking in these fields is disturbing, disruptive, dangerous and so, in a sense, is the example of Jesus, who was conspicuously a creative teacher always asking questions, often difficult and disturbing questions, and answering questions with more questions.

Much of the ferment in education and social life generally, which is sometimes ascribed to decadence and despair about values, may be interpreted more optimistically as a symptom of an exciting and perilous revolution which, bit by bit, is ousting traditional authority from the central position it has occupied for centuries and replacing it with individual responsiveness, responsibility, and creative thinking. If the 'new morality' means anything more than an unprecedented permissiveness in sexual ethics, it is a reaffirmation of Kant's insight that to be moral, human beings must be autonomous creative moral agents. The concern of democracy, the ideal of social equality and, one would hope, the notion of Christian fellowship are *not* about the crowd in its likeness but about all one's neighbours in their marvellous and maddening uniqueness. We and our neighbours are not a flock of faithful, stupid, stinking sheep. That flocculent metaphor left over from the Palestine of two thousand years ago must not obfuscate our thinking today, nor must the teacher, even subconsciously, cast himself in the peaceful pastoral role of shepherd whose flock dutifully nibbles the Parnassian grass to which he leads them.

Martin Buber, the great Austro-Jewish theologian, detected in man two basic and autonomous instincts, both of which are massively confirmed in their central importance by modern psychology. The first is the gregarious instinct for communion or 'mutuality', and the second is the solitary instinct of creativity or 'origination', as he called it. This creative instinct, he argued, could not, as some psychologists were apt to suggest, be derived from some basic force, the 'libido' or the 'primal will to power'.

> 'Here is an instinct [he said] which, no matter to what power it is raised, never becomes greed, because it is not directed to having but only to doing; which alone

among the instincts can grow only to a passion, not to lust; which alone among the instincts cannot lead its subjects away to invade the realm of other lives. Here is pure gesture which does not snatch the world to itself, but expresses itself to the world.'

How does this instinct of 'origination' most readily express itself? We might wish to answer, in developing human relationships and indeed in any sphere where we have some freedom of action. Buber's answer is that

> 'Art is the province in which a faculty for production, *which is common to all*, reaches completion. Everyone is elementally endowed with the basic powers of the arts; these powers have to be developed, and the education of the whole person is to be built up on them as on the natural activity of the self.'[1]

For an authoritative psychological view, one might turn to Professor C. W. Taylor. He writes, 'Apparently, many lay persons have a quite different notion from that held by psychologists when they think of creativity in the arts. They believe that most people have zero potential to be creative, whereas a few persons are fortunate and have creative talent in varying degrees. An assumption held by psychologists, with which many art educators concur, is that all persons have some potential to be creative in one or more ways.'[2] It really does look as though the teacher who despairs of getting creative work from some of his classes should in all humility examine his methods of approach. It is all too easy to ascribe our educational successes to good teaching and our failures to stupid children.

Does all this make sense? To me it certainly seems to square with the widest possible view of human history. Every culture develops art as surely as it develops language. From palaeolithic times onwards, before the birth of agriculture, architecture, or industry, simultaneously, perhaps, with the emergence of myth and religion, man has painted and carved, danced and decorated, and made images of natural and supernatural creatures, and the earliest surviving writings in most languages are poems. It is odd, to say the least, that an activity as fundamental to all known cultures as art should have come to be regarded as a luxury, a frill, desirable, perhaps, but dispensable in life and in education.

Art, then, is the natural product of man's basic instinct of origination. If that instinct is thwarted, frustrated, neglected, it may well turn to destructive ends, or so Erich Fromm believed in his 'Psychological Enquiry into the Roots of Destructiveness'.[3] And another writer, Sylvia Ashton-Warner, sees the child's mind as 'a volcano with two vents; destructiveness and creativeness. And . . . to the extent that we widen the creative channel, we atrophy the destructive one'.[4] Certainly where creativity is denied the whole life of the person is stunted, particularly in emotional growth, for the great prime function of art, underlying even its most playful manifestations, is to objectify feelings so that they can be ordered, contemplated, understood, shared, and enjoyed. The cathartic theory of the function of art is as credible today as it was when Aristotle first propounded it.

The discovery and exploitation of the creativity of children in our education in the past half-century or so (and I do not mean to suggest that the process has got further than a tentative start) has paralleled in a curious way the probable order of evolution of the arts in human history. The creative use of dance and drama came early in the century with great teachers like W. M. D. Rouse, Caldwell Cook, and Gordon Craig, followed closely by a new respect for child art, in the sense of painting and modelling, under the inspiration of men like Franz Cizek and Wilhelm Viola on the Continent and Herbert Read in England. Music has lagged behind, but so even more conspicuously has literature. Long before the last war there was a fairly wide recognition that, given imaginative teaching, children could create in paint or clay and through movement in dance-drama things that were beautiful and significant judged even by adult aesthetic standards. It is only in the past fifteen or twenty years, however, that many

[1] Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man*, ch. 3, pp. 112 ff.
[2] Calvin W. Taylor, *Creativity: Progress and Potential*, ch. 1, pp. 7–8.
[3] Erich Fromm, *War Within Man* (Philadelphia), pp. 21–2.
[4] Sylvia Ashton-Warner, *Teacher* (New York), p. 33.

teachers have begun to respect children's writings as something more than another pile of marking. We have been obsessed with the notion of correctness and conformity to a high adult standard of literacy to such an extent that the creative possibilities for children in the most readily available of all media, their own language, has been sadly unexploited. And language has, of course, a unique importance as a medium. Through language we structure and make intelligible the terrifying deluge of sense impressions which would otherwise submerge us: with language we create the space-time world of stable concepts through which we make sense of the outer world we live in. With language, too, we can begin to bring order, coherence, and control to the world within, to the bewildering flux of emotions, impulses, and desires which, without language, would control us. Not without reason Wittgenstein said, 'The limits of my language mean the limits of my world.'

Literature, appropriately chosen and imaginatively handled, can be of immense importance in this process of stabilizing experience and making it intelligible, extending it vicariously and adding dimensions of moral perceptiveness. But English teaching has been hag-ridden by Literature with a capital L; the wrong Literature at the wrong time and handled in the wrong way. What has been forgotten is the old truism: the quickest way to appreciate an art is to practise it; and that this applies to literature as much as to the other arts. Without the constant humbling discipline of creative endeavour the person with a literary education all too easily falls into that complacent, élitist, narcissistic conviction of his own exquisite sensibility, even his own moral and spiritual superiority, which we all know so well. Humility in the face of creation is not a bad ingredient in our concept of the educated man.